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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3245  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 3727  
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0649  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 NEW DELHI 003248

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SCUL](#) [IN](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: RIFTS EMERGE AMONG INDIAN MUSLIMS OVER FOREIGN  
POLICY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES

REF: A. NEW DELHI 3199  
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2561  
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2539  
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2363

NEW DELHI 00003248 001.2 OF 005

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an ugly marriage of convenience, Indian Muslim extremists from the Wahhabi-influenced Deobandi sect and radical pro-Iran Shias have joined forces with the opportunistic regional Samajwadi Party (SP) of Uttar Pradesh (UP) to mount an anti-US political campaign. More moderate Muslims, largely from the Sufi-influenced Barelvi sect and Shias sympathetic to Iraq's Ayatollah Sistani, have tired of this agenda and have begun to organize a counterforce. The once-radical Imam Ahmed Bukhari of Delhi's Jama Masjid has joined forces with the moderates to sponsor a "Delhi conference" to establish a pan-Indian Islamic organization to propagate an economic development agenda and move the focus of Indian Muslims away from foreign policy and anti-Americanism. Although the "Delhi conference" issued a series of constructive proposals for Muslim economic uplift, the extremists interjected their own anti-US proposals. Barelvi clerics, angered at the outcome of the event, have formed their own organization, which hopes to work with Congress to unseat the current SP government in UP and gain economic concessions from the UPA government. Splits between and within Indian Muslim sects demonstrate that despite the calls for Muslim unity, the divisions remain as deep as ever, with US foreign policy a continuing focus despite moderates' efforts to change track. End Summary.

## Traditional Islamic Divisions

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¶2. (C) The Wahhabi-influenced Deobandi sect and radical Shias, heavily influenced by Teheran have formed a marriage of convenience over the past year to organize Indian Muslims around a pro-Iran, anti-US stance that heavily emphasizes foreign policy issues. The alliance has been encouraged and supported by the Samajwadi Party (SP) which currently rules Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's largest state. The heavy-handed efforts of the pro-Iran axis have caused formerly quiescent and apolitical Muslims (primarily from the Barelvi and Shia sects) to become more politically active and outspoken. In recent weeks, these Islamic moderates have held conferences in Delhi and Lahore to counter the radicals. The most prominent took place at Delhi's Jama Masjid and was sponsored by its Imam, Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari.

### The Jama Masjid Conference

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¶3. (U) New Delhi's Jama Masjid is among the largest and most influential mosques in Asia. Its current Imam, Syed Ahmed Bukhari on March 18 sponsored an "All India Representative Conference of Muslims" aimed at uniting Indian Muslims around a common program. The conference was well-attended by representatives of all major political parties and India's four major Islamic sects, Barelvis, Deobandis, Shias, and Ahle Hadith.

¶4. (U) In his opening address, Imam Bukhari stressed that Islam does not condone terrorism. However, claiming that "western countries" (unspecified) have committed terrorism

NEW DELHI 00003248 002.2 OF 005

against Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq," he decried what he said was a tendency to label "Muslims who protest against these terrors," as terrorists. He also called on Muslims of all sects to unite "for the sake of the nation, religion and Islam," and announced that the Jama Masjid Council would establish branches throughout the country to work with all legitimate Muslim organizations to realize basic goals, including the restoration of the legal rights of Muslims, the safety of mosques and madrassas, providing economic opportunity to Muslims, and working to prevent communal outbreaks.

### Makes Demands on the Government

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¶5. (U) At the conclusion of the conference, the attendees announced the formation of an "association of all national and regional Muslim organizations," and issued a set of 17 resolutions. The conference gave the GOI six months to respond to its demands, which address long-standing Muslim claims for greater benefits from the state. These included:

--the provision of a compensation package of USD 440 million to Muslim victims of the 2002 Gujarat riots and other anti-Muslim riots that have taken place throughout the country,

--a doubling in the amount of GOI funding to the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (which provides low interest loans to minority communities) from USD 120 million to USD 240 million,

--a merging of the GOI's small scale industries program into the newly-established Ministry of Minority Affairs, coupled with a government financed program to revive Muslim handicrafts, small industries and small businesses,

--a GOI pledge to increase support to madrassas while not interfering in their administration,

--a GOI pledge to dedicate five percent of the education budget to a special program aimed at eliminating "educational backwardness" among Indian Muslims,

--an increase in GOI funding to the Maulana Azad Education Foundation, which assists Islamic Universities, from USD 25 million to USD 250 million,

--the reservation of 15 percent of civil service positions for Muslims (currently only two percent of civil servants are Muslims),

--the extension of "scheduled caste" status to all Muslim dalits (formerly untouchables), and

--the reservation of 27 percent in public universities for Muslims from "other backward classes."

#### Anti-American Resolutions

¶6. (C) The Samajwadi Party (SP), which currently governs the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), sent two representatives to the conference, including SP General Secretary Amar Singh. When Singh began criticizing the US in his address, Imam

NEW DELHI 00003248 003.2 OF 005

Bukhari and other leaders interrupted his speech, pointing out that the conference was meant only to address economic and domestic issues. Our contacts who attended told us that the resolutions were negotiated in closed door sessions during which the SP representatives worked closely with those from the Wahhabi-influenced Deobandi sect to insert two resolutions. One condemns "conspiracies to target Iran" and "establish the hold of oppression and autocracy" over Iraq, and demands that Indian Muslims support the "sovereignty of Iran and Iraq." The other "strictly condemns" the visit of US President Bush to India, saying that he "is responsible for the bloodshed of tens of thousands of Muslims."

#### An Inside View

¶7. (C) In a May 5 meeting with Poloff, influential Barelvi cleric Qari Mian Mazari, one of the conference organizers, asserted that they want to divert Muslims from emotional but irrelevant foreign issues back to working for the economic betterment of the community. Saying that Indian Muslims have been "hijacked" by extremists, Mazari and Bukhari hope to unite them around an economic upliftment agenda. Mazar affirmed that issues such as Iraq, Iran and Palestine are "not real Muslim concerns," and the community needs to "correct course." The repeated and counterproductive obsession with international issues, he asserted, falls into the trap of the RSS and Hindu extremists who claim that Indian Muslims have their own foreign policy agenda and are not concerned with India.

¶8. (C) Emphasizing that there are currently 120 million Muslims living below the poverty line in India, Mazari asked rhetorically what the SP, with its anti-US agenda and Muslim vote bank, had done for the Muslims of UP? He pointed out that Chief Minister's Yadav caste make up only seven percent of UP's population but occupies 65 percent of all government jobs, and that the SP government has hired 10,000 police since coming to power, of whom only two were Muslim. Although he refrained from endorsing any political party, Mazari clearly hopes to work with SP opponents to unseat Mulayam.

#### Barelvis Start their Own Initiative

¶9. (U) Culturally, Indian Muslims have been strongly influenced by Sufism with its emphasis on mysticism, tolerance and disdain for power and governments. The Barelvi

sect has its headquarters in the UP city of Bareilly and 65 percent of India's Sunnis belong to it. Bareilvis espouse many Sufi doctrines and integrate them with Islamic folk beliefs and some Hindu practices. They have long remained aloof from politics, and these primarily rural Bareilvis have been traditionally disinterested in Indian foreign policy issues.

¶10. (C) On May 4, influential Bareilvi cleric Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi asserted to Poloff that many in his sect were not pleased with the outcome of the Jama Masjid conference, as they resented the inclusion of anti-American foreign policy resolutions and speeches. He pointed out that on April 28/29 Bareilvi clerics meeting in Lucknow launched a new organization to be called the "Muslim Mottahada Mahaj" (Muslim United Front - MUF), which hopes to address many of

NEW DELHI 00003248 004.2 OF 005

the same economic issues raised in Jama Masjid conference. The MUF has announced additional conferences in Rampur and Bareilly in West UP and Gorakhpur in East UP to ensure the broadest possible outreach to rural Muslims. This was followed by a May 3 meeting in Delhi, in which 250 influential Bareilvi clerics formed a new Islamic political organization to be called the "Tanzim-e-Ulema-e-Islam" (conference of Islamic clerics). Razvi maintained that the new group hopes to convince formerly apolitical Bareilvis to back the Congress Party to end SP rule in UP. Razvi, who helped organize the Delhi event, claimed that the Tanzim will work with the BSP and Congress to form a new government in UP that would be more responsive to Muslim needs.

¶11. (C) Razvi pointed out that there has been a shift among Indian Muslims that will impact future elections. The Deobandi sect, which was the only major Muslim sect to play an influential role in the Indian independence movement and opposed the formation of Pakistan, has traditionally backed Congress. However, the Deobandis have now been captured by the SP, as demonstrated by joint SP/Deobandi anti-Bush demonstrations during the recent visit of the President and the close association between Amar Singh and the Deobandi leadership. Angered and embarrassed by the Deobandi demonstrations, Congress has severed ties with the Deobandi political organization "Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind" (JUH). Razvi and other Bareilvi leaders now want to move their organization into the pro-Congress position previously occupied by the JUH.

#### Moderate Shias Continue to Organize

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¶12. (SBU) Approximately 250 moderate Shia clerics, under the leadership of Maulana Mirza Mohammad Athar, met in Lucknow on May 7. The conference openly criticized the latest edicts from Iran on its nuclear program and backed the GOI's anti-Iran stance in the IAEA and elsewhere. Maulana Athar observed from the podium, "If our government finds it important from the national perspective to vote against Iran, why should Shias oppose it?" The conference also passed a resolution condemning "terrorism in all its forms and dimensions, while criticizing the Taliban and Saddam Hussain for "butchering Shias, maligning Islam and murdering democracy." Athar refused to criticize the US, stating "How could we be ungrateful to the country which helped protect Shias from murderous and dictatorial regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq?"

#### Comment - Muslims are More Divided Than Ever

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¶13. (C) Indian Muslims are increasingly divided into two hostile camps. Sunni sects with a Wahhabi orientation like the Deobandis and the Ahle Hadith, have allied with more radical Shias to pursue a pro-Iran anti-US agenda based on emotive foreign policy issues such as the Iran nuclear program, Palestine, Iraq, desecration of the Qu'ran, and

insulting cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. They allege that the US is linked to all of these issues and pursuing an "anti-Islamic" foreign policy. It is common knowledge in Muslim circles that this growing axis is well funded by the government of Iran and Arab Wahhabi donors. Most Muslim interlocutors agree that while Muslims have widely-varying views on these issues, they would unite to protest military

NEW DELHI 00003248 005.2 OF 005

action by the US against Iran (Ref A). This group is being countered by a coalition of formerly apolitical Barelvis and more moderate Shias (whose principal organization is the Shia Muslim Personal Law Board). This "silent majority" of moderates denounces terrorism and extremism and focuses on economic development and education. While not overtly pro-American, the Barelvi and Shia organizations hope to move Muslims away from foreign policy issues and believe that it is in the Muslims' interests to cultivate amiable relations with the US. An alliance between newly energized Barelvis, moderate Shias and the Congress Party could revive Congress fortunes throughout the Hindi belt and form a powerful counterfoil to the dominant Deobandi/Wahhabi axis currently defining the political debate among Indian Muslims.

¶14. (C) In India, both sides in this intra-Muslim conflict are using the tools of democracy. The ultimate winner in the conflict is democracy itself, as it allows Indian Muslims the freedom and space to pursue their differences using vote blocs, electoral alliances, the media, processions and demonstrations. This contrasts starkly with the situation in some other Muslim countries where Muslim factions have resorted to "car bomb wars" and street fighting to settle their differences.

¶15. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
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